

Expanding Empire Chapter 11: The global war drive of business and the forces that will stop it

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By the time of the Korean War, the imperialist system of “expand or die” had reached a stone wall that abruptly limited its world political perspective—although not its actual economic expansion. That is still going on, and at a geometrically increasing rate.

Both the struggle of the peoples toward freedom from foreign exploitation and the determination of the U.S. to continue and expand that exploitation converged on June 25, 1950, where the 38th Parallel crosses the peninsula of Korea. And this brought the long expansion of U.S. big business into an entirely new arena, socially as well as geographically.

It was not now a massacre of the Indians for the sake of railroad operators. It was no longer the decimation of the starved subjects of a weak emperor, as it had been in 19th-century China. Nor was it a colossal “world” quarrel with rival plunderers of other countries over who would command the labor of the colonies.

Now it was an armed collision with whole peoples awakening to a new social destiny.

The oil, steel and Coca-Cola kings had extended their domains to the edge of their political and social borders. The revolution against 35-cents-a-day exploitation, the still-expanding economic needs of big business—and the antagonism of two worldwide social systems—all converged in the relatively small country of Korea.

Sam Marcy described the new situation in 1950. He wrote of the now-telescoped aspect of local class struggle and world revolution:

“Can we say that the Korean War was wholly and exclusively generated by the elemental revolutionary outbursts of the Korean masses? This would be just as false as to conceive Korea as a mere pawn in the struggle between two arbitrary powers. While it is incontestably valid to affirm that the revolutionary ferment of the Korean workers and peasants was the most indispensable social ingredient in the composite interplay of class forces in that corner of the Asiatic crucible, it would be entirely wrong to regard it as a unique phenomenon divorced from the historical processes of our time. ... Korea was not a struggle between ... the “barbaric East” and the “democratic West,” but between the upper and lower strata of a convulsed social organism, which could no longer endure the restraints of class stratification.” (Sam Marcy, “The Global Class War,” 1950)

Vietnam is the same kind of struggle. Its military aspects are different; the degree of revolutionary feeling and activity in the South is different. The manner and tempo of U.S intervention is different.

But underneath it all, Vietnam is a struggle “between the upper and lower strata of a convulsed social (world) organism, which could no longer endure the restraints of class stratification.”

Vietnam's rich resources not the main prize

The war in Vietnam is not just about the tin, rubber and rice of that country, although then-President Dwight Eisenhower did speak of the possible loss of “prodigious amounts” of these products back in 1954, when contemplating the “loss” of Vietnam.

The French imperialists have about \$500 million still invested there, a great deal of

it in rubber plantations. And U.S. companies have accomplished a miracle of “instant investing” by acquiring a stake of about \$400 million right behind the lines of battle. In addition, the huge U.S. government installations—bases, docks, etc.—are worth five or six times that amount.

Wounded GIs on the way to the hospital can often see the billboards advertising what they’re being made to fight for. The Chase National Bank and the Bank of America are both in there, and the First National City Bank is on the way. Newspaper columnist Mary McCarthy says that the petty-bourgeois military pilots often survey the hills for good motel and hot dog spots. They sense the real plans of U.S. business, and know that they will have a friend at Chase Manhattan.

But these plans are incidental to the basic cause of the war. They are incidental to the world plunder of the exploiters and the world revolution of the exploited.

It is impossible to determine, for example, at just what moment U.S. big business would have to expand into China or “die,” either from the economic point of view we have explained in the first section of this booklet, or from the political point of view we are attempting to develop now. But the drive of big business to do so, combined with its refusal to give up what it already has taken, produces Vietnam. The constant escalations, the provoking of China, the imminent further widening of the war right now are all due to this fundamental fact. President Lyndon Johnson and his generals are but the surface manifestations of the deep crisis.

Vietnam itself is hardly the place the billionaires would have voluntarily chosen as the place in which to “expand or die.” This was chosen for them by the Vietnamese liberation fighters and by the forces of world revolution.

But what an eloquent, if tawdry, example of the true nature of the dying imperialist colossus is provided in Vietnam. At the very moment the whole Asian investment (and probably much more) is at stake—and when all the peoples of the world are

watching the behavior of the U.S. in the crucial conflict in Vietnam—the agents of “free enterprise” scurry to Saigon to sell every imaginable commodity produced in the United States, and the biggest U.S. banks set up shop to preside over the coming bloody harvest of gold they hope to reap.

Tawdry Viet booty symbolizes U.S. world plunder

The “small” U.S. investment in Vietnam in its own way proves more conclusively what the war is all about than all the big talk about a “Marshall Plan for Asia” after the hoped-for conquest. The conquest of the puppets alone has made a brothel out of Saigon—and a garbage heap.

(There are mitigating factors, of course. Some of the millions of discarded U.S. beer cans are now being used to build shacks for the Vietnamese.)

But it is not just what the U.S. can sell in Vietnam. It is not the precise amount of tin, rubber, rice and other materials in Vietnam that determines the fierce will of U.S. corporations to be the successors of the French there or that determines the grand, decades-long struggle of the Vietnamese for their freedom.

It is the key political character of the Vietnamese struggle that endangers U.S. ownership not only of the tin, rubber, rice, etc., of Vietnam, but of the silver, gold, bauxite, iron, manganese, diamonds, spices and a thousand other products, and above all, the command of labor in Asia and the rest of the world.

Politics is indeed “concentrated economics,” as Lenin said. And much more concentrated than usual in the Vietnam War.

Vietnam raises a question mark over the conquests of the past as well as the expansion of the future. The war is so desperate because it is an expression of the politics of imperialist survival and proletarian revolution.

U.S. fear: Vietnam may open way to world liberation

Vietnam is important strategically, as the generals are well aware. But it also seems to have become one of those “nodal points” where not just a couple billions in investments are involved, but the whole \$112 billion throughout the whole world. The loss of this \$112 billion would undoubtedly bring whole industrial and financial empires inside the U.S. to bankruptcy. Above all, the accompanying victory of the world’s oppressed, and the emergence of a new social system would be the gravestone of imperialism itself.

This liquidation of empire is what they have in mind when they talk about the domino theory and the threat of communism and the “defense of the U.S as a Pacific power,” etc., etc. This is why they spend \$30 billion a year to conquer a nation whose total national income is only 10 percent of that amount. This is the fundamental reason for the war—rather than the graft, the specifically Vietnamese profits, or even the profits from war orders, which are only derivative and are the outward signs of degeneracy, rather than the cause.

Expressing in his own way the idea of the global class war, the supposedly dull, but certainly well-informed servant of big business, former President Dwight E. Eisenhower, wrote in a letter to Winston Churchill on April 4, 1954:

“But regardless of the outcome of this particular battle [Dien Bien Phu], I fear that the French cannot alone see the thing through, this despite the very substantial assistance in money and materiel that we are giving them. ... And if they do not see it through and Indochina passes into the hands of the Communists, the ultimate effect on our and your global strategic position with the consequent shift in power relations throughout Asia and the Pacific could be disastrous and, I know, unacceptable to you and me. ... This has led us to the hard conclusion that the situation in Southeast Asia requires us to take serious and far-reaching decisions.” (“Mandate for Change, 1953-1956,” Eisenhower, p. 346)

Just a few pages earlier, Eisenhower had said flatly:

“It was generally conceded that had an election been held Ho Chi Minh would have been elected Premier [of the whole country].” (“Mandate for Change,” p. 337)

But the “serious and far-reaching decisions” had nothing to do with democracy or the will of the people, either in Vietnam or in the United States. And it is now clear that the decisions have already been made—by Eisenhower and his successors. They have decided that Asia is worth another war. And no matter how they escalate it, nor what defensive appearance they might finally put upon it, the war they have in mind will be a war for big business, just as all their previous wars in Asia have been.

They all slaughtered for big business

When Theodore Roosevelt and his naval and army brass were considering their attack on the Philippines, there was no thought of “Communists” taking over and of course no propaganda claims to that effect. They were not defending the Philippines against anybody but other imperialist rivals. And their only ideological justification was that of fighting for “civilization” against “savages.” But then, as now, it was a war for big business.

When Wilson made the world “safe for democracy” over the bones of 10 million soldiers, he was not fighting against German atrocities, “Kultur” or the Kaiser; he was fighting for U.S. big business.

When Franklin Roosevelt claimed he was fighting German fascism with the Jim Crow U.S. Army and the all-white—except for the kitchen help—U.S. Navy of that time, he was also fighting for U.S. big business. The whole postwar history of U.S.-West German collaboration proves it as eloquently as the investment of \$3.2 billion by U.S. business in West Germany itself.

When Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson joined the “crusade” against

communism, they were still fighting for big business, with this important difference: Communism is not merely another business rival. It is the antithesis of economic exploitation and demands the abolition of the whole system of making profits out of other people's labor.

Whether the Vietnamese peasants say this categorically or not, this is exactly what they are fighting for—the end of human exploitation. And this is why the U.S. government of big business fights them so savagely.

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